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ABSTRACT

A speech on the main purpose of the university, particularly with respect to its relation to the working class, is presented. It is pointed out that this purpose should be to serve the community in the true sense of the word. In Africa, today, there is a race between education and economic and social catastrophe. The training function of universities with particular reference to updating and upgrading skills and knowledge of the entire national work force at all levels is important. Problems to be solved by the university include: (1) increasing production in all economic sectors; (2) establishing good trade union organizations, (3) cultivating a sense of nationalism, (4) cultivating a greater sense of respect for traditions and culture, (5) producing "free" citizens who know and can judge for themselves about political and economic systems and issues, and (6) effecting social change without a breakdown. An important function of the university is that of training the trainers. In addition, in many African countries, books and publications which are geared to local conditions, and more importantly, to labor education and industrial relations in Africa are in very short supply. It is therefore part of the responsibilities of African universities to develop suitable primers, textbooks and other literature at various levels of education. Possible barriers that might make it difficult or impossible for the universities to perform their role in workers' education are listed. These include inadequate financial support, poor physical facilities, and undue government interference. (Author/CK)

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The Role of Universities in Workers' Education

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ALEXANDER N. CHARTERS

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THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN WORKERS' EDUCATION*

by

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Apart from self-employed farmers, workers constitute the largest single section of the population in most countries. No doubt, the main purpose of a university should be to serve the community in the true sense of the word. To fulfil this important mission effectively, therefore, every university must serve the workers. Otherwise, the university must be asked to justify its existence. Indeed, any university that fails in this important respect must be considered as a mere "white elephant" with only a nuisance value to the community. The role of universities in workers' education is therefore that of service with special reference to the education and training of workers. By workers we mean all categories of employed persons who are not in the management cadre. Although it is the writer's strong belief that all non-self-employed persons should be classed as workers, one is not unmindful of the fact that in most official circles, we normally refer to the three arms of industry or of the economy as consisting of labour, management and the Government.

Do the workers need any education? If they don't, should the universities impose themselves on them? If the workers need some type of education, then what type, and how should it be given?

In Africa today, there is a race between education and catastrophe. We must have education or we would have the alternative which is low productivity, low income, poverty, disease and squalor working in a vicious circle. Ignorance generates social mal-practices, industrial chaos and political instability which in turn will lead to economic chaos and stagnation. We want accelerated rural development and industrialisation at both urban and rural levels. But these will not come by mere desire. We must work for them. During this second development decade and thereafter, the universities must provide education of adequate quality and quantity to equip the people to cope with the challenges that the fast changing developments in technology and the concomitant economic and social changes will pose. The training function of universities with particular reference to up-dating and up-grading skills and knowledge of the entire national work-force at all levels is therefore imperative.

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Before we go into specifics, let us first consider the role of universities in workers' education in a general way. Cambridge and Oxford Universities conceived the idea of university responsibility for adult education because they felt that university education should not be limited to the small, privileged "elite" who found their ways into the universities. Happily, most universities now believe that for any university to fulfil its rightful mission and to justify its existence, it must believe in and accept the new, but growing philosophy that in this technological age, there must be constantly improving communications between "the ivory tower and the market place".

One of the main objectives of a university is to produce citizens who will be capable of solving the problems of the nation. Among such problems, the following may be mentioned:

(i) Increasing production and productivity in all sectors of the economy.

(ii) The establishment of good trade union organisations and responsible industrial relations.

(iii) Cultivating in the citizens a sense of nationalism, national unity and national cohesion as well as a genuine sense of internationalism.

(iv) Cultivating a greater sense of respect for our traditions and culture.

(v) Producing "free" citizens who know and can judge for themselves about political and economic systems and issues.

(vi) Lastly, but by no means the least is the general problem of social change without a breakdown.

A close study of the problems we have mentioned will show that of all educational platforms, the university - because of its detached nature - is the most qualified to provide a forum where matters could be objectively examined without fear of victimisation of any sort. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that the best form of education for living is best done by the university under a dispassionate atmosphere and in the true university spirit of the search after the truth, with the humble realisation that one can NEVER get to THE TRUTH - one can always move closer to it at every attempt. If there is any educational institution which can be relied on to be unbiased in a world of ideological conflicts within the labour movement, that institution is the university. Another unique characteristic of the university is that its function is both diagnostic and remedial - to discover what might be needed and then to supply it.

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We have said that the three main arm of the economy are labour, management and the Government. No doubt it is part of the responsibility of labour to work for the improvement of economic and social welfare for its members. But perhaps more important is the fact that it is also part of labour's responsibility to work for the improvement of economic and social welfare of the general population. Workers must constantly bear in mind that labour's fate is inextricably bound up with the fate of management as well as that of the general population in the nation. There is therefore the need for co-operation between the three important agencies responsible for economic growth, national unity, national stability and national development; namely, the Government, Labour and Employers, to ensure industrial peace, political stability and general national prosperity. These objectives cannot be attained by mere desire. Kowledge is important. Actions based on ignorance are dangerous and may be self-defeating. Indeed, ignorant people are dangerous people. For example, labour - and especially the leaders - must be well-informed on job evaluation and how to measure productivity in order to be able to demand what can justifiably be regarded as reasonable rates of pay for workers. If they succeed in stampeding management into paying more than is reasonable and the Company collapses, everybody including management and labour must find other jobs.

One of the major functions of universities which could be regarded as special to them is to produce "free" persons, the necessary components of the intelligentsia which is often lacking in many developing countries. By the intelligentsia, we mean "that part of a nation that aspires to independent thinking". It refers to these members of the society who are capable of thinking, and who really do think for themselves, no matter what risks may be involved. At present we have too few of such people and we must produce more of them fast in all sections of the population, labour not excepted.

At this stage, we must clarify that role means the expectations required of any given position one occupies. Naturally, this involves rights and obligations (or duties). Rights are what one should expect from others because of one's position, while obligations are the reverse of rights; namely, what others expect one to do.

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1. Houle, Cyril Co., Universities in Adult Education (Paris: Unesco, 1952) pp. 21 - 26.

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A University which claims to be modern must perform three main functions - teaching, research and extension. Extension in this context also involves research and teaching in terms of total involvement with the community. To be able to perform its rightful role in workers' education, a university must consider the total educational needs of the country or of the community. In doing its work, it must be careful to limit itself to what it can do well and it should not interfere in the province of other educational agencies. Among universities themselves, wasteful duplications of programmes must be avoided. In any country, there should be regular co-ordination in extension and adult or continuing education services. Each university extension programme should have areas of specialization and areas in which it is a general practitioner. It is also important for universities constantly to bear in mind that "we educate men, not job holders".

More specifically, the universities must conduct research into the manpower needs and aspirations of the community and plan their programmes to meet such needs. The development of human resources is an important function of universities. Perhaps we should add that in terms of workers, such research should be geared to the most pressing needs of the country. In any case, priorities must be identified. It should therefore be strongly tilted towards applied research while fundamental research must also be handled as the needs demand. Universities, particularly in developing countries, cannot afford to be isolated from the community and its problems. As we have said, a good university should keep a good channel of communication alive with labour, management and the Government. It must aim at good teaching, meaningful applied and fundamental research, and practical service in terms of meeting the training and research needs of the community.

An important function of the university is that of training the trainers. Workers may have their own Training Schools. Enlightened management will also have regular training programmes for workers. It is part of the function of universities, through their Extension, Adult or Continuing Education or Extra-Mural Departments to arrange appropriate training programmes for Instructors in Labour's own training institutes. University personnel should also be available to help with occasional lectures or even the teaching of special courses in such institutes. In performing these functions, however, there must be no dictation from or unnecessary interference by university personnel.

In most parts of the world today, not all persons with the will and

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ability to do university work have the opportunity to go to or to maintain themselves in residence at a university. Universities must therefore provide evening and correspondence courses leading to degrees and diplomas. Others may provide general liberal education as well as specialised programmes to up-date and up-grade knowledge, skills and techniques. Thus, workers will be able to improve themselves academically and professionally. At this stage, let us emphasize that the establishment and administration of correspondence education is very expensive. For over seven years, Nigerian Universities have recognised the urgent need of correspondence education in meeting the educational needs of the working people of that country, but due to lack of funds, none of them has been able to embark on this worthwhile and much-needed educational project (this is being written in March, 1972).

Radio and T. V. programmes could also be well designed to meet some of the educational needs of labour. Sometimes, correspondence education must be supported by radio and T. V.

We live in a technological age in which knowledge too quickly becomes obsolete. There is therefore a need for well-planned special courses, seminars, conference, workshops, symposia, special lectures, etc. for workers. Some of the programmes may be for a day or two. Others may extend over a week or even, months. Many of such programmes should be tailored to the specific needs of the target groups. Before each programme is designed, training needs of the group envisaged must be discovered, and the general and specific objectives of such programmes must be defined. At the end of each programme, there should be an evaluation to see how much of the goals of the programme has been accomplished in order to know how to modify similar programmes in the future.

In many African countries, books and publications which are geared to local conditions, and more importantly, to labour education and industrial relations in Africa are in very short supply. It is therefore part of the responsibility of our universities to develop suitable primers, textbooks and other literature at various levels of education. Besides writing in learned journals, university lecturers and professors should consider it part of their extension duties to contribute to the popular magazines and national newspapers whenever they have special views or knowledge on particular issues of the moment. It is to be hoped that the time will soon come when universities will encourage and inspire their teachers to engage more in this type of service.

Let us follow this controversial statement with yet another with

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which many university people may disagree. The writer believes that it is one of the duties of universities to preserve the heritage of the past. Due to false colonial and religious orientation, many Africans despise and disown African art, sculpture, music, etc. The university has the opportunity and indeed the obligation to channel and tie together all that adult education must provide for labour. In this regard, universities could arrange exhibitions and provide special library service in form of the book-box, mobile or other special lending system. Drama and other cultural activities could also be used to inspire workers to greater heights.

Another area in which universities can make worthwhile contribution to the education of workers is through the publication of the reports of important conferences, seminars and workshops as well as pamphlets on special issues requiring objective analysis or pamphlets aimed at supplying basic factual information to enlighten the workers.

Consultancy is a field that must be increasingly used by labour. This could be in form of advice on curriculum development, on the administration of training programmes, or on special techniques and teaching aids that could be used for particular programmes. Special relations could be maintained with specific Departments or Faculties of the University. For example, the Faculty of Law is best qualified to advise on industrial law and industrial relations while the Adult or Continuing Education Department may advise on various aspects of training methods and techniques.

Co-ordination of Training programmes: The university is best qualified to serve as an independent link among agencies such as government, industry and labour in the programmes for the training of their workers. Labour, management and Government representatives can also participate in the same training programme organised by the university. The advantages of such programmes are many. For example, improved communication and greater understanding are encouraged and each section of the economy finds it easier to appreciate the point of view of the other. A co-ordinating research board with appropriate representatives of the universities and of the relevant government departments, labour and management could also be extremely useful in determining research priorities and, maybe, in finding money and personnel to tackle the research needs of the community including, of course, those of workers.

From all the above, the question may be asked: Are our universities performing their rightful role in workers' education? If they are, then to what extent? If they are not, why are they not? Many factors may weaken the effectiveness of universities in performing their role in

2. See Hannah, H. W., Resource Book for Rural Universities In the Dev. Countries(Urban & Lond: University of Illinois Press, 1966)pp.34-35.

workers' education. Among those are:[2]

- Inadequate financial support
- poor physical facilities or lack of physical facilities
- undue interference by government or absence of sympathetic support by leaders in government.
- lack of continuity in leadership (of either or both the universities and the community).
- apathetic faculty members.
- limitation or denial of academic freedom.
- Lack of effective channel of communication between labour leaders and the universities and/or Government.
- unrealistic research.
- defective appointment and promotion policies within the universities themselves.
- too many small departments.
- poor library service
- last, but no means the least, a lethargic extension education effort.

The above are possible barriers that might make it difficult or even impossible for the universities to perform their rightful role in workers' education. They are mentioned with the hope that all concerned will help to remove such barriers where they exist, and check their emergence where they are absent. It is heartening to note that on their part, "the universities, both private and public, have become increasingly aware both of the vast range of valuable services which they can provide to aid in the everyday life and work of the nation, and of the fact that participation is one of the most fruitful of these services".[3] We can only hope that in their new awakening, the universities will be encouraged and inspired by all individuals and agencies that have the power to do so. In closing, we cannot overemphasize that often-forgotten fact that all teaching and research departments of the University should regard some form of adult or continuing education a vital part of their contribution to the building and development of the nation. All these activities will, however, be co-ordinated by an adult education, extra-mural or continuing education department.

3. Mcmahon, Ernest, E., in Training and Development Handbook (Edited by R. L. Craig & L. R. Bittel: McGraw-Hill, 1967) p. 4[illegible]

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